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527 are seen putting off the shore and
501 steering their course homewards.

527 The custom of making swings on
526 Ascension Day, is very common in Malta, especially among the country people. In almost every village, lots of women and children may be seen swinging together and singing merrily on the day of *Lapsi*.

527 No reason could perhaps be assigned
193 by the Maltese for the practice of celebrating *Lapsi* by parties and picnics on the water, and for making swings, except that they follow the custom of their ancestors.

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372
•859 ***St. JOHN'S EVE***

Not unlike other nations, the Maltese are not indifferent in celebrating

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the Nativity of St. John by kindling great fires in the public streets, and giving their children dolls to carry in their arms on this day, in order to make good the prophecy respecting the Baptist "*Multi in nativitatae ejus gaudebunt*".

Days and even weeks before this festival, groups of children are seen going out into the country fields to gather straw, twigs and all sorts of other combustibles which they store up for St. John's eve.

On the night of the 23rd. of June, the day before the festival of the Saint, great fires are kindled in the streets, squares, and market places of the towns and villages of the Island, and as fire after fire blazes out of the darkness of that summer night, the effect is singularly striking.

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SAINT MARTIN'S DAY

527 One of the greatest family feast-days, among the Maltese, is that of St. Martin's, which is held on the 2nd and 3rd Sunday of November.

Happiness and true enjoyment reign supreme in every household on this [593] special day. Pater and materfamilias entertain at dinner their married sons and daughters, with their respective consorts and children, besides nephews, nieces, and others allied by ties of consanguinity.

Every body enjoys his share of sweetmeats on St. Martin's day, with a due allowance of Marsala or some other sort of good Sicilian wine.

527 262 857 Children look forward with pleasure to this day, being always regaled, by either their parents or some other member of the family, with a small bag

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crammed to the top with hazelnuts, chestnuts, figs, sweets and other edibles, besides a nice small roll studded with hazelnut-kernels and covered all over with sesame. 527 262 857

With these bags and rolls the happy children come out walking along the streets, proud of what they were lucky to get, then they meet in groups or parties and indulge in games for the nuts.

The most favourite game for children on this occasion is what they call "ta 'l castell" which means hitting at the castle. The castle consists of three nuts put near each other, topped by a fourth. They each arrange, say two or three of these castles in rows, and keep throwing by turns—every one wins the castle or castles he succeeds hitting and demolishing. 527 524 857

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salt may produce its effects it must be thrown by a married woman, not by a maiden.

II. *GHAGIUSA*

We have an old custom in Malta to make children believe that the *ghagiusa* (the oldest woman living in the parish) is killed at noon on Thursday, the middle of Lent.

Mothers, after fasting the first twenty days of lent, send their children to the door of the parish church, or of some convent to see the sexton or some friar throwing the old woman from the steeple down below.

The disappointment of the children is indeed very great when at noon, they don't see the *ghagiusa* thrown down.